

**TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT
SELECT BOARD REGULAR MEETING
Minutes of November 23, 2021**

- I. ROLL CALL.** Select Board Chair K. David Maxwell, Board members Julie H. Goodrich (absent), Nathaniel Miller, Charles Morse, and John Stevens. Also present were Town Manager Jeff Schulz, Acting Clerk Kenneth McCann, Christian Meyer (Senior Planner, Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission), Dayton Crites (DuBois & King, Inc.), Deborah Zuaro (Conservation Commission), Merry Kay Shernock, Matthew Kolb, Gerard LaVarnway, David Black, Jonathan Spencer, Jeremy Whalen, Nelson Hoffman, Anne Donahue, Amanda Zoecklein, Bonnie Kirn Donahue, Britta Eberle, Carolyn Stevens, Casey Cutkomp, Erin Packie, Colin Bright, Kim Caldwell, Lydia Petty, Maryann Beaupre, Kenneth Goslant, Shannon Doney, Stephanie Maass, Susan Barnard, Susan Stillinger, Tim Schwartz, Sue MacMartin, and Elroy Hill.

Chair Maxwell called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. Participants had the option of attending the meeting either in person or remotely through Go-to-Meeting.

- II. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE.** Those persons present were asked to rise and recite the Pledge of Allegiance. The remote contingent also participated as much as possible.

- III. SET/ADJUST AGENDA.** There were no changes to the posted agenda.

IV. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (SCHEDULED):

- a. Deborah Zuaro, Chair, Northfield Conservation Commission: Town Forest Access Parking Alternatives.** Ms. Zuaro noted the municipality received a \$20,000 grant with the assistance of the Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission (CVRPC) that was used to fund a feasibility study for greater access to the Northfield Town Forest. Public feedback on the process was achieved through three (3) Community Site Visits, a Community Forum, and an online survey. Ms. Zuaro said CVRPC contracted with DuBois & King, Inc. to perform the study and representatives from both groups are here to present the current draft of the study. An earlier draft was available for review on the webpage dedicated to the feasibility study (<https://centralvtplanning.org/northfield-town-forest-access-feasibility-study-information>). Christian Meyer is a CVRPC Senior Planner and said the grant application was among several submitted. He then asked Dayton Crites from DuBois & King to provide a brief overview of the proposed project. Mr. Crites had brought the project presentation on a zip drive that he then shared with the meeting participants. He said the study located at eight (8) possible sites for new forest access parking: the Downtown area, Slate Avenue, Elm Street, Prospect Street, Highland Avenue, Byam Hill, the Cheney Field, and the Shaw Outdoor Center located at Norwich University. The public feedback was clear that residents did not want the Cheney Field area disturbed by parking spaces, etc. Mr. Crites noted there already are parking spaces available in the Downtown area but they are quite distant from the forest access points. Slate Avenue, Elm Street, and Highland Avenue were considered due to their proximity to the Town Forest but were rejected as options for various reasons. That left as possible sites Prospect Street, the Shaw Outdoor Center, and Byam Hill. If Prospect Street was chosen, it would see eight (8) new dedicated parking spaces along the road along with signage directing people to the nearest forest access point. However, the installation of new parking spaces may require relocation of utility poles and might have to be delayed for several years due to planned stormwater work in the area. Mr. Crites said the Shaw Outdoor Center currently has parking areas that could be used for Town Forest access and the number could be expanded at a later time. However, since Norwich University owns this site, there is no guarantee of future public access. However, Norwich University officials have been contacted and they have been willing to see the conceptual plans. Byam Hill was considered a good location due to its proximity to Cheney Field, which would allow those with limited agility to access the Town Forest. Byam Hill now has limited parking but there is a possibility of installing a turnaround on the road that would not impinge on existing private driveways. The turnaround would have a retaining wall installed and would provide for three (3) additional parking spaces. This work would require obtaining an easement from the adjoining property owner. These proposals will be included in an updated feasibility study that will be available soon for public review and comment at the website indicated above. Based on the feedback received, a priority list will be developed and brought to the Select Board early next year.

Chair Maxwell asked if any of the Select Board members had any questions or comments regarding tonight's presentation. Board member Miller had no questions but did note that the Select Board members did receive an email from a Byam Hill resident that had concerns about establishing additional parking and traffic on this steep and narrow road. Board member Stevens also had no questions but is interested in how the problems associated with the various proposed sites will be resolved. He did note that the grant originally included a study of the pedestrian crosswalk in Northfield Falls and asked what happened to that. Mr. Meyer said that matter has not been forgotten but will be treated in a separate study as the next phase of the overall project. Board member Morse commended everyone who has been involved in this project to date, which includes local volunteers, committees, consultants, etc. He had some questions regarding the easement that would be required for the proposed work on Byam Hill. Mr. Crites said an accommodation would have to be reached with the property owner that might included the exchange of funds or other considerations. Chair Maxwell also was grateful to those involved with the project to date and was looking forward to see the updated report. He then opened the meeting to questions and comments from the public.

Gerard LaVarnway lives on Hill Street, which is off Byam Hill. He was the person who emailed the Select Board members with his concerns regarding the unsuitability of Byam Hill for this project due to problems associated with its steep and narrow condition that get worse each winter. He felt the intersection of Byam Hill and Hill Street is notorious due to poor sightlines, etc. Mr. LaVarnway felt the biggest issue with Byam Hill was neighborhood safety as there are a number of children on the street and additional parking and traffic would create real danger. Board member Morse asked if seasonal parking on Byam Hill was an option. Mr. LaVarnway said it would be an improvement but not perfect as visitors to the area do drive very fast during the summer months.

Stephanie Maass is a Byam Hill homeowner and she agrees with Mr. LaVarnway that vehicle speed is a real problem on the road and a real hazard to neighborhood children. She would rather not have additional parking and increased traffic on Byam Hill. Nelson Hoffman is a member of the Town Forest Stewardship Committee (TFSC) but is not speaking tonight for this group. He also opposes the proposed work on Byam Hill as the additional parking spaces created would be quickly overwhelmed, which would result in cars parked on the narrower sections of the road. Mr. Hoffman feels that expanded parking opportunities at the Shaw Outdoor Center was a much more logical solution and the cost of this should be minimal.

David Black is another Byam Hill homeowner and he agrees with the other residents regarding the unsuitability of Byam Hill for a project of this nature. He felt that the unsafe traffic situation on the road is year-round due to the narrowness of the road. He added that the worst speeders are those not familiar with the road so bringing in additional traffic would worsen an already bad situation. He also agreed with Mr. LaVarnway about the dangers associated with the Hill Street/Byam Hill intersection.

Carolyn Stevens asked if it were possible to choose a combination of two (2) or three (3) possible parking locations rather than focus only on one solution. Mr. Crites said that certainly possible based on public feedback and other considerations. Chair Maxwell noted that there will be additional venues for public input in the coming weeks. Mr. Crites said the online survey information probably will be collected through next February. Board member Morse likes the way the public has been able to express their views throughout the feasibility study process.

Jonathan Spencer's family have lived on Byam Hill since 1960 and he believes his driveway will be used as a turnaround even if the proposed improvements (retaining wall, parking spaces, etc.) are installed on the road. He doesn't want to stand in the way of progress but just does not see the proposal as feasible for this road. Bonnie Kirn Donahue says that it is good to see the proposed developments on paper so that tangible alternatives can be discussed. She likes the concept of improved wayfinding so the installation of signage directing people to Town Forest access points is an important part of this project. Ms. Donahue felt it was vital that hikers, etc. are properly directed to stay on public trails rather than wander onto private property. She also felt greater forest accessibility is important so that more people, including those with mobility difficulties, are able to use these public lands.

Regarding the possible expansion of parking spaces at the Shaw Outdoor Center, Chair Maxwell asked if there has been constant dialogue with Norwich University (NU) officials. Ms. Zuaro said there has been in conjunction with the VOREC Grant Application (see below) and that NU has provided a landlord permission letter. There will be additional interaction with NU officials as this project continues. Ms. Hoffman asked if there is a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the university and municipality regarding use of the Shaw Outdoor Center to access the Town Forest. Chair Maxwell doubts there is but will look into this. He does believe that working with NU will become an important part of this project. TFSC member Lydia Petty has spoken to officials at the Green Mountain Family Practice, which is adjacent to the Shaw Outdoor Center, and they said that the four (4) new parking spaces recently added at the clinic will remain permanent and available to trail users on weekends, etc. Ms. Petty said the Community Walks were important venues for obtaining public feedback and said it might be best to look at the big picture of improved public access to the Town Forest rather than get bogged down in neighborhood concerns. She said increasing on-street parking is never going to be popular with the affected residents so other solutions probably will be needed. Ms. Petty agreed with Ms. Donahue about the real need for improved signage directing people to the Town Forest and then keeping them on authorized paths.

Mr. LaVarnway agrees with Mr. Hoffman that the obvious solution would be to work with NU to develop additional parking areas adjacent to the Shaw Outdoor Center. This would be low impact and low cost compared to the other suggestions that would directly affect residential neighborhoods. Chair Maxwell has heard from many community members over the past five (5) years regarding the importance of outdoor recreation in this community and the need to generate improved opportunities. Many individuals and committees have dedicated much effort to this end result. Board member Stevens asked why there has been no consideration of other points of access to the Town Forest from more rural roads, such as Turkey Hill, Barrows Road, etc. Mr. Meyer said the focus of the feasibility study has been to provide access to those living in or around the population center of the community.

Ms. Crites said the three (3) options focused on tonight are the result of the public feedback received through the online survey, Community Walks, and Community Forum. He now will incorporate the views expressed tonight as well as future online feedback, etc. to revise his recommendations to the Select Board. He will return at a future meeting to present them early next year. Ms. Petty had been confused regarding the timeline for this project, believing that the Select Board members would be asked to make a decision tonight but now sees that the information-gathering stage of the project is ongoing. Mr. Spencer asked why additional parking on Slate Avenue was not considered a viable option given the street's proximity to a trail access point as well as the Downtown area. Mr. Crites said this option was considered but it was determined that the topography of the street was not favorable. Bad slide slopes were found during the study process and this would require significant widening of the road. Mr. LaVarnway noted Slate Avenue already has a number of public parking spaces and there have been suggestions that the nearby Brown Public Library could become a lending location for snowshoes, etc. for use in the Town Forest. Perhaps Slate Avenue should be reconsidered as a possible access site.

Chair Maxwell appreciates the amount of public participation in tonight's meeting. He said there would be additional opportunities for public comment and any future meeting with this subject on the agenda will be well-advertised.

- b. **Merry Kay Shernock: American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA).** Ms. Shernock noted the \$1,900,000 in ARPA funds coming to Northfield is a lot of money for this town. The rules regarding how these funds can be used are still being written and sometimes are confusing. The Select Board held a special meeting recently (10/19/21) that was dedicated to this matter in order to explain the process and try to find the best way to obtain public views on the best usage of these federal funds. Ms. Shernock has been exploring this since that meeting and now suggests it would be best to hold a number of neighborhood meetings including the various geographic sections of the community, such as Northfield Falls, the Downtown area, West Northfield, South Northfield, the area along Vermont Route 12A, etc. Ms. Shernock felt these facilitated neighborhood meetings should be held in public locations within those very neighborhoods.

Ms. Shernock felt these gatherings should be well-structured with at least one Select Board member present as well as a professional meeting facilitator. There would be emphasis in allowing all attendees the opportunity to ask questions, express their views, etc. Ms. Shernock noted there are many existing community groups that would be willing to help advertise these events, etc. and bring in community members who don't often attend such gatherings. The meetings should have two-way conversations with residents asking questions and the Select Board member present answering to the best of their ability. Mr. Shernock felt any proposed use of these ARPA funds should be subject to a cost benefit analysis to determine whether the expected cost would provide comparable benefits to the community. This analysis can be brainstormed at these public forums. Ms. Shernock said she would be more than willing to accept any suggestions that would improve the concept she has created over the past few weeks.

Chair Maxwell was very grateful to Ms. Shernock for following up on the request he made for suggestions on how to best conduct public outreach regarding use of ARPA funds. He felt Ms. Shernock has provided a sound and detailed plan that should be soon implemented. Chair Maxwell said Ms. Shernock should work with Manager Schulz on the logistics. He then asked Ms. Shernock how she planned to next proceed. Ms. Shernock said she probably would contact existing local organizations, which are listed in the Human Resource Directory on the municipal website. The use of these ARPA funds doesn't have to be determined until the end of 2024 so there is sufficient time for a proper decentralized decision-making process. Chair Maxwell said he is willing to work with both Ms. Shernock and Manager Schulz to get the process going.

Board members Miller and Stevens were grateful for Ms. Shernock's suggestions for getting the community involved in this important decision. Board member Morse noted that about twenty (20) years ago, the Vermont Council on Rural Development came to Northfield and met with a large number of people in order to provide community leaders with a blueprint on how to move into the future. Many of the recommendations in the resulting report, such as Town/Village merger, have been achieved but others were not due to lack of funding. We now are in a very unique situation with Northfield receiving large amounts of federal funds (both from ARPA and the more recent Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act) so we definitely need public involvement in the decisions that need to be made. Board member Morse felt the bulk of the federal funds probably would be devoted to public utility improvements and broadband internet initiatives but other options also will need to be explored. Chair Maxwell thanked Ms. Shernock for her initiative and said he will keep in touch with her as the process develops.

V. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- a. **November 9, 2021 (Regular Meeting).** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve the minutes. **Motion passed 3-0-1, with Board member Miller abstaining.**

VI. APPROVAL OF BILLS

- a. **Approval of Warrant #10-22.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve Warrant #10-22 in the amount of \$86,578.99. Board member Stevens noted the purchase of one mile of culvert and asked where it was going. Manager Schulz said Highway Foreman Trent Tucker bought a large amount of culvert to keep in stock. It will be used for a number of projects around the community. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**
- b. **Approval of Biweekly Payroll through November 14, 2021.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve the biweekly payroll in the amount of \$100,835.09. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**

VII. SELECT BOARD

- a. **Proposed FY 2022/2023 Town Budget.** Manager Schulz said he and Finance Director Laurie Baroffio have worked the past couple months to create the first draft of the proposed FY 2022/2023 Town Budget. The Budget & Financial Review Subcommittee (Board members Goodrich and Morse) met last week (11/16/21) to provide their input on the proposed budget before it went to the full Select Board. Their main recommendation, which is incorporated in the budget now provided to the Select Board members, is to move up replacement of the Town Grader to the next fiscal year.

Manager Schulz said the proposed budget made use of prior year surplus and some ARPA funds to create a mostly level-funded budget that will not require any increase in the local property tax rate. He said \$74,000 in ARPA funds will be used to build up the economic development fund. The Operations and Maintenance (O&M) budget will see a 7.1% increase primarily due to scheduled salary increases for union employees as well as COLA wage adjustments. The use of surplus funds will be directed towards Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) and Capital Equipment Plan (CEP) one-time purchases. Manager Schulz then provided a brief overview of CIP and CEP accounts that will see significant funding, such as Main Street Bridge Replacement (\$150,000), Paving (\$210,000), Union Brook Road Reconstruction completion work (\$33,880), Sidewalks (\$110,000), new Police Cruiser (\$45,000), Town Grader replacement (\$105,000), etc. Manager Schulz said the Select Board will need to decide how many budget meetings to hold over the next couple months. Since this is a level-funded budget, the subcommittee thought three (3) would be sufficient. Board member Morse said some public discussion of the proposed budget will be required in the interest of transparency. Chair Maxwell agreed. The first budget meeting will be held on Tuesday, November 30, 2021 at 6:00 p.m. in the Community Room. The operations budget will be discussed at that time as well as a tentative schedule of future budget meetings.

- b. **Stony Brook Bridge Repair Project Bids.** Manager Schulz said this bridge needs major repairs. There had been some consideration of bridge replacement but that would cost over \$1,000,000. Bids for bridge repairs were solicited and a pre-bid meeting was held on site. Four (4) bids from qualified contractors were received by yesterday's deadline: M.A. Bean Associates (\$379,000), CCS Constructors, Inc. (\$393,000), Daniels Construction (\$364,685), and Parent Construction, Inc. (\$443,000). Manager Schulz had estimated most bids would come in between \$350,000 and \$400,00 and this proved to be accurate. Manager Schulz now recommends that the bid be awarded to the low bidder (Daniels Construction). Motion by Board member Stevens, seconded by Board member Miller, to award the Stony Brook Bridge Repair Project to Daniels Construction for the bid amount of \$364,685. Board member Stevens noted in the Daniels Construction bid they anticipate the bridge repairs will require it to be closed for six (6) to eight (8) weeks. Manager Schulz confirmed this and said he informed Gillespie Fuels & Propane, which has a facility on Stony Brook Road, of this possibility. They understand that the bridge is in poor condition and needs repair so they can detour around the work area. The project RFP stated that all work must be completed before October 15, 2022 but Daniels Construction would like to start the project in late spring so the work should be finished by mid-summer. Chair Maxwell would like the road closure time kept to a minimum. Manager Schulz said this was stressed at the pre-bid meeting. Board member Morse received copies of the bid submissions right before this meeting and is not comfortable acting on this tonight. Without objection, the motion was tabled until next week's special meeting (11/20/21). Russ Barrett asked if a temporary bridge could be installed during the repairs. Manager Schulz said such a bridge would have to be rented from the State of Vermont and he will look into this.
- c. **Vermont Outdoor Recreation Economic Collaborative (VOREC) Grant Application: Review and Consideration of Landowner Permission.** Manager Schulz said the grant application, which was discussed at a previous meeting (10/12/21), is nearly completed but needs a letter of support from the municipality as well as indication that the municipality (as landowner) would permit work to be done in the Town Forest. If the grant application is successful, the funds would be used for improved signage, new parking areas, etc. for better Town Forest access. Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve and authorize Chair Maxwell to sign the aforementioned letter. Ms. Zuaro said this grant would be a great opportunity for the municipality and allow for improved wayfinding, trail enhancements, etc. The grant application will be sent as soon as the letter is received. Board member Morse is pleased with the work of local volunteers on this grant application. Mr. Hoffman has seen the grant application and wonders if the \$25,000 anticipated for parking spaces should be reallocated due to tonight's discussion. Ms. Petty believes the grant application is written to allow funds to be spent based on the final recommendation of the Town Forest Access Feasibility Study. Ms. Zuaro said she already discussed such a possible reallocation with VOREC officials and there was no problem due to flexible language in the grant application. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**

VIII. TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT

- a. Economic Development Director Position.** Manager Schulz said the position has been widely advertised and two (2) applications already have been received. The deadline for submissions is Thursday, December 23, 2021.
- b. Resilient Urban Forests Grant Application.** Manager Schulz said this was a separate grant application being submitted by the Northfield Conservation Commission. He does not believe the municipal letter of support requires Board authorization and although he originally planned to sign it himself, Manager Schulz now feels it would be better if Chair Maxwell signed it instead.
- c. NAVI Christmas Tree and Wreath Sale.** Manager Schulz noted Northfield Ambulance Volunteers, Inc. (NAVI) will be holding its annual tree and wreath sale at the Ambulance Bay from Saturday, November 27, 2021 through Christmas Eve. Trees and wreaths come in a variety of sizes and are available for sale from 4:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. during the week and from 9:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. on weekends. Free delivery is available.

IX. BOARD MEMBERS' COMMENTS, CONCERNS, QUESTIONS

- a. Broadband Internet Access Project.** Board member Miller has read an article indicating that fifty (50) Northfield and Roxbury rural residents will soon be eligible for high-speed internet access. Board member Miller checked with Jeremy Hansen of CVFiber and learned this was part of a special project affecting residents in the Loop Road area. Other rural Northfield residents might have to wait until 2024 until high-speed internet become available in their areas.
- b. Local Mask Requirement.** Board member Miller noted that the Vermont Legislature recently passed a law allowing municipalities to establish local mask-wearing requirements for indoor facilities, etc. He would like this matter on the agenda when the Select Board holds its next regular meeting (12/14/21). Board member Morse asked if the Vermont League of Cities & Towns (VLCT) polled its member communities before lobbying for this legislation. Manager Schulz doesn't remember being contacted. Board member Morse felt some local outreach should have been made before VLCT acted.
- c. Vermont Council on Rural Development (VCRD) Local Visit.** As Board member Morse indicated earlier, the last VCRD Local Visit in Northfield was held in 2001-2022. Board member Stevens has learned that after a break due to COVID-19, VCRD is now accepting applications for future local visits and he would like Northfield to apply to get on the waiting list. Manager Schulz said he would send this out as soon as possible.

X. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (UNSCHEDULED). There was none.

XI. ADJOURNMENT. Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to adjourn. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**

The Board adjourned at 9:24 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kenneth L. McCann

Kenneth L. McCann, Acting Clerk

An audio recording of this meeting is available in the Town Manager's Office.

These minutes were approved at the Select Board regular meeting of December 14, 2021.